

Lesson 1 THE FAITH OF THE FIRST CHRISTIANS

Acts 1

Memory Verse: “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” (Acts 1:8 NIV)

“Acts is an important book for our understanding of the origins and growth of the early church. Its longer title, The Acts of the Apostles, reflects the prominence of the apostles Peter and John in the early days of the church, and the prominence of the apostle Paul in the subsequent expansion of the church into the non-Jewish (Gentile) world.” (Dr. Keith Graham.)

Acts is also an indispensable historical record for understanding the Apostle Paul's epistles; without it we could not understand some of the things he wrote. It is the only Bible book that records the historical transition from Judaism to Christianity. It provides basic information about and insight into the early church. And it challenges every modern Christian.

A famous Hollywood producer once said that for a movie to be successful, it must start with an earthquake and work up to a climax. Luke certainly didn't follow that formula when he wrote the book of Acts. Except for the ascension of Jesus Christ, events recorded in Acts 1 are anything but dramatic. After all, what is exciting about a business meeting?

Then why record these events? Why didn't Luke just start with the story of Pentecost? For several reasons.

To begin with, Luke was writing volume two of a work that started with what we call the gospel of Luke (see Luke 1:1–4), and he had to begin with the proper salutation and introduction. We don't know who Theophilus was or even if he was a believer, but Luke's salutation suggests that he may have been an important Roman official (see Acts 23:26; 24:3; 26:25). Likely Theophilus was a Christian or at least a seeker who was carefully studying the Christian faith. His name means “friend of God,” and we hope he lived up to his name.

But even more important, Luke had to build a bridge between his gospel and the book of Acts (Luke 24:50–53). At the close of his gospel, he had left the believers in the temple, praising God. Now he had to pick up the story and explain what happened next. Imagine how confused you would be if, in reading your New Testament, you turned the last page of the gospel of John and discovered—Romans! “How did the church get to Rome?” you would ask yourself; the answer is found in the book of Acts.

The book of Acts is also the account of the work of the Holy Spirit in and through the church. The gospel of Luke records what Jesus “began both to do and teach” in His human body, and the book of Acts tells us what Jesus continued to do and teach through His spiritual body, the church. Even today, congregations can learn much about church life and ministry from this book, and this even includes the business meetings!

Scriptural Reading: Acts 1:1-26

Things to learn: 1) Believing in the Risen Christ 2) Dedicated to each other and prayer 3) Dependence on God's leading.

Questions:

Q1. In this chapter, we see the believers taking care of “unfinished business” and getting ready for Pentecost. What they said and did, reveals to us the faith of the church. What did they really believe in as taught by the Lord in verses 1 to 11?

Q2. What commitments can be found in the early believers from verses 12 to 14 and verse 24 which we can learn from as modern day Christians?

Q3. What conclusions can we draw from verses 15 to 26 which formed the foundational decision making process for church ministry and the office of Apostles as recorded in the book of Acts?